Moving Beyond Compliance: Promoting Research-based Professional Discretion in the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts

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State- and local-level mandates are currently being implemented to ensure strict compliance to the new national Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS for ELA) and related assessments. These standards provide many potential opportunities to improve literacy education nationally and locally. However, the CCSS for ELA will likely face several implementation problems. Their content does not always comport with what research reveals about grade level progressions, text complexity, close reading, writing, and new media literacies. Such issues can result in gaps between research-based instructional practices and what teachers actually do in the classroom. Moreover, there are serious concerns about linking CCSS for ELA assessments with high-stakes testing because this may result in teaching that reflects narrow understandings of reading and writing. The CCSS for ELA also might limit the scope for educators to exercise professional judgment, which is critical for strong implementation in the classroom. To better inform policies related to the CCSS for ELA, particularly in Illinois, we conducted a comprehensive review of research, policies, and practices, and created recommendations for enhancing literacy education across K-12 schooling in light of the CCSS. This brief delineates recommendations for state and local policy makers to promote the use of research-based professional discretion by teachers and administrators to improve instruction in the implementation of the CCSS for ELA, and outlines the development of an Illinois Literacy Research Agenda. The findings indicate needed policy actions in five areas: curriculum and instruction, teacher education and professional development, program/school leadership, assessment, and research.

Introduction

For decades a "reading crisis" has been declared in America (Gardner, 1983). On standardized tests, gaps in performance have persisted between White and non-White students and across states. For example, on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2013) only 35% of the nation's fourth graders read at or above proficient levels, up from 34% in 2011 and 29% in 1992. Whereas 46% of White and 51% of Asian/Pacific Islander students scored proficient in reading, only 18% of Black and 20% of Hispanic students did. Although writing has received less attention than reading, similar trends exist in writing, particularly in high stakes testing environments (College Entrance Examination Board, 2003).

Such outcomes in reading and writing clearly highlight inequalities in literacy teaching and learning for students across the country. The developers of the CCSS for ELA, the Council of

Chief State School Officers (CCSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), identified a number of problems with then-current state standards, assessments, and accountability systems that in part drove such inequalities in reading and writing outcomes:

> State standards and assessments generally do not reflect the knowledge and skills needed for student success in college and careers. Low standards and inadequate academic preparation of high school graduates results in high costs for individuals and the nation. The rigor of standards and assessments varies widely from state to state. Under the accountability system introduced by NCLB, many states have lowered their standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The CCCS for ELA provide many potential opportunities to address these problems. They are a national effort to unify disparate learning expectations and outcomes across states. Moreover, the CCSS for ELA are focused particularly on problems of career and college readiness because increasingly technical and literate demands are being placed on our workforce, and reading and writing abilities have become a "marker of high-skill, high-wage, professional work" (College Entrance Examination Board, 2004, p. 19). As education researcher Deborah Brandt (1999) claims in her research linking literate and economic development, "More and more people are now being expected to accomplish more and more things with reading and writing." In short, the CCSS for ELA are intended to provide rigorous, benchmarked, and research-based outcomes for student learning across the U.S.

Despite the importance of the goals and potential of CCSS for ELA, there are several problems they will likely face. The substance of the CCSS for ELA do not always comport with what research reveals about grade level progressions, text complexity, close reading, writing, and new media literacies. Such issues can result in gaps between research-based instructional practices and what teachers actually do in the classroom. In addition to these content-based disconnects, there are serious concerns about linking CCSS for ELA assessments with high-stakes testing practices because this may result in teaching that reflects narrow understandings of reading and writing. Moreover, although the CCSS for ELA provide considerable scope for educators to exercise professional judgment within local situations—a significant feature of positive school reform efforts (Wilson & Berne, 1999)—this freedom may be lost within the implementation process.

Accordingly, we conducted a comprehensive review of research, policies, and practices, and created recommendations for enhancing literacy education across K-12 schooling in light of the CCSS for ELA. This brief delineates recommendations for state and local policy makers to promote the use of research-based professional discretion by teachers and administrators to improve instruction in the implementation of the CCSS for ELA, and outlines the development of an Illinois Literacy Research Agenda. The findings indicate needed policy actions in five areas: curriculum and instruction, teacher education and professional development, program/school leadership, assessment, and research.

Content and Organization of the English Language Arts Standards

What does a vision of college and career readiness look like for English Language Arts outcomes? The K-5 and 6-12 CCSS for ELA are organized into integrated strands focusing on reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language. They advocate for an interdisciplinary approach to literacy instruction as a "shared responsibility within the school," as well as for an increased focus on reading and writing using complex texts. The CCSS for ELA acknowledge that "although the standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of communication are closely connected." The CCSS for ELA also highlight cross-disciplinary expectations for literacy through the inclusion of standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. The CCSS for ELA outline a vision that students read more informational texts and write more persuasive pieces as they progress through the grades (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1
Distribution of Literacy & Informational Passages by Grade 2009 NAEP Reading Framework

Grade	Literary	Informational
4	50%	50 %
8	45%	55 %
12	30 %	70 %

Source: National Assessment Governing Board (2009) Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office.

Table 2
Distribution of Communicative Purposes by Grade in the 2011 NAEP Writing Framework

Grade	To Persuade	To Explain	To Convey Experience
4	30%	35%	35%
8	35%	35%	30%
12	40%	40%	20%

Source: National Assessment Governing Board (2011) Writing Framework for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress, pre-publication edition, Iowa City, IA, ACT, Inc.

Based on these expectations, and taking into account the former state standards, professional organizations, states, and districts have identified multiple "instructional shifts," or changes that will need to occur in ELA curriculum and instruction, in order to support the new content and ideas in the CCSS for ELA. Particular examples of these identified instructional shifts can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Examples of Instructional Shifts Needing to Occur in ELA Curriculum and Instruction

Fisher and Frey, in coordination with the International Reading Association (IRA; Fisher & Frey, 2013)	**National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE, 2013)**	**Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE, 2013)**	**Chicago Public Schools (CPS, 2013)**
• Reading and writing to inform, persuade, and convey experience • Increasing text complexity • Focus on speaking and listening • Text-based evidence for argumentation • Focus on academic vocabulary and language	• Teach close reading and powerful writing • All students need practice with complex texts • Teach content-rich nonfictional and informational text • Literacy as a shared responsibility	• Balance the amount of literature and informational texts • Use textual evidence to support reading and writing • Expand academic vocabulary	• Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary • Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational text • Reading and writing grounded in evidence from text

Commonalities across these identified "instructional shifts" for literacy include the expectations that students: (a) go from reading "just right" texts in a variety of genres in their ELA classes to reading more complex nonfiction and informational texts across content areas, and (b) move from doing very little writing to extensive writing grounded in textual evidence. A major professional organization in language and literacy studies, the International Literacy Association (ILA), supports the notion that "The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts represent qualitatively different outcomes and their accomplishment will require significant shifts in educational practices involving teachers across the curriculum" (IRA, 2012).

Intentionally, the CCSS for ELA do not define how teachers should teach, nor do they describe all that can or should be taught. They instead advocate, "Teachers are...free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards." This stance to "focus on the results rather than the means" is supported by research underscoring the efficacy of school reform that centers on bottom-up teacher-driven approaches (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

CCSS for ELA and Educational Research

Although many of the goals of the CCSS for ELA align with current research, some of the specific standards either make assumptions without a strong research base to support them or are not explicit enough about the research base. As a result, the CCSS for ELA may be implemented in negative or unintended ways.

Lack of Research

Issues relating to the CCSS and associated assessments have been widely discussed in professional and public contexts. However, limited research focused on the CCSS for ELA has been conducted. Much extant research addresses the public's and other stakeholders' perceptions of the CCSS (Achieve, 2012) and describes content comparisons of CCSS with other state, professional, or international standards (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). The majority of these studies consider the CCSS more generally, including both English Language Arts and Mathematics, and many additional studies focus exclusively on Mathematics (Michigan State University, 2013). Similarly, studies examining implementation of the CCSS have not systematically addressed English Language Arts teaching and learning; rather, they center on issues such as how states and cities are supporting implementation (Southern Regional Education Board, 2014) and the cost of implementation (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2012). Although some studies have investigated the issue of text complexity (Williamson, Fitzgerald, & Stenner, 2013), there is a need for research to address other issues relating to literacy and CCSS, particularly related to implementation (discussed in more detail below).

Potential Instructional Implementation Gaps

Because an overarching analysis of the research base for the CCSS for ELA does not yet exist (Pearson, 2013), we have identified five potential instructional "implementation gaps" that highlight areas where the standards as written may encourage a gap between research and practice (See Table 4). Although the spirit of the CCSS for ELA tends to align with literacy research, the particulars warrant attention, especially in the ways they are taken up in instruction. In other words, without explicit knowledge of the research in these areas, some standards will likely prove to be especially confusing or difficult to teachers and administrators to effectively implement.

Gap 1 relates to *grade level progressions.* Research shows that literacy learning develops for each individual over time and across contexts; however, the CCSS for ELA make assumptions about developmental differences and decisions related to topics addressed at each grade by relying on professional consensus rather than empirical research (Pearson, 2013).

Gap 2 relates to *text complexity.* Teachers often match texts to readers to find the appropriate level of challenge for each individual that allows him/her to learn in his/her appropriate "zone of proximal development." This pervasive pedagogical practice has strong opponents and proponents in literacy research. The CCSS for ELA offer a different perspective—they cite the gap between reading competence at the end of high school and beginning college as the rationale for increasing the levels of text complexity *all* students encounter in K-12. However, limited research exists on *how* readers can effectively engage with complex text (Heibert & Mesmer, 2013). It remains to be seen, then, if this call for providing all readers with complex texts will be supported by instructional research.

Gap 3 focuses on *close reading.* Research shows that knowledge and meaning are created in interactions between readers and texts, but the CCSS for ELA emphasize how close reading helps readers locate knowledge, evidence, and meaning within a text.

Gap 4 relates to the CCSS for *writing.* Although there are countless purposes for writing dependent on different contexts, audiences, and genres, the Standards highlight three primary communicative purposes of writing—to persuade, to inform, and to convey experience.

Gap 5 focuses on *new media literacies.* The CCSS for ELA give cursory attention to digital reading and writing, stressing that students need to be able to synthesize and apply information from print and digital sources. However, research on new media literacies documents the need for students to have the noted competencies and social and literacy skills necessary for online reading and writing (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, & Clark, 2010). Such a need has been addressed in states like Minnesota, which has added new standards for media literacy that require students to "understand, analyze, evaluate, and use different types of print, digital, and multimodal media; evaluate the aural, visual, and written images and other special effects used in mass media for their ability to inform, persuade, and entertain; and examine the intersections and conflicts between visual (e.g., media images, painting, film, graphic arts) and verbal messages" (Beach & Baker, 2011, p.30).

Each of these gaps highlights potential implementation challenges. The International Literacy Association (ILA) provides implementation guidelines for numerous other "issues [from the CCSS for ELA] that have proven to be especially confusing or challenging to implement," including the use of challenging texts; embedded foundational skills for grades K-2; a lack of focus on *how* to teach comprehension effectively; the ways vocabulary is embedded across the strands; the shift to writing to learn about information; the need for increased collaboration to teach disciplinary literacy; and the challenges of meeting the needs of diverse learners to reach equal outcomes (International Reading Association, 2012). The gaps also showcase a need for the CCSS for ELA to address social, cultural, and political factors in literacy more explicitly in particular standards.

Table 4
Summary of Potential Instructional Implementation Gaps

Potential Instructional Implementation Gaps	**The Standards Focus On:**	**The Research Shows:**
Gap 1: Grade level progressions	Literacy learning progresses by grade level, defining "end-of-year expectations and a cumulative progression designed to enable students to meet college and career readiness expectations no later than the end of high school" (Key Design Considerations).	Literacy learning develops for each individual over time and across contexts (Heath, 1983; Street, 2003).
Gap 2: Text complexity	The gap between reading competence at the end of high school and beginning college is so great that we must increase the level of text complexity students encounter in K-12 (Key Features of the Standards).	Limited research on how to engage readers with complex texts.
Gap 3: Close reading	"Close reading" helps readers locate knowledge, evidence, and meaning within a text (Standard R.1).	"Every text exists in a context" (Moore & Zancanella, 2014) and knowledge and meaning are created in interactions between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1994).
Gap 4: Writing	There are three primary purposes of writing- to persuade, to inform, and to convey experience (Standards W.1, W.2, W.3).	There are countless purposes for writing depending on situated contexts, audiences, and genre (Bazerman, 1988).
Gap 5: New media literacies	Students need to be able to synthesize and apply information from print and digital sources (Standards R.7, W.6, and W.8).	"New media literacies," including particular cultural competencies and social skills (e.g., play, performance, appropriation, networking), are critical 21st century learnings (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

Potential Implementation Challenges

In addition to the content-based disconnects between the CCSS for ELA and educational research, the CCSS for ELA face additional potential challenges upon implementation.

Linking of the CCSS for ELA to High Stakes Testing

Policies at the national and state levels have linked the CCSS for ELA to high stakes tests. However, there is evidence that accountability policies that tie testing scores to high stakes decisions such as school performance designation, state funding, teacher evaluation, and student advancement/graduation sometimes have negative consequences for student learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007) and teachers' professional discretion. For example, literacy research on No Child Left Behind found that curriculum and instruction often reflect narrow understandings of reading and writing in high stakes environments that promote "teaching to the test." Policies in these environments often mandate curricular and instructional compliance that restricts teachers' professional discretion and does not exemplify research-based language and literacy teaching. Research further suggests that such accountability policies are more likely to restrict the kinds of literacy activity available to students who are identified as "different" in terms of categories such as race, culture, language, disability, and income (Dooley & Assaf, 2009). This accumulated research and the fact that there has been little research on the tests designed by two state consortia (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, or SBAC, and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC) have led numerous national educational organizations, including the IRA, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals to issue statements supporting the CCSS but also advocating for delayed high-stakes assessments (Learning First Alliance, 2013).

Concerns about Limiting Teachers' Professional Judgment

Although the CCSS for ELA provide considerable scope for educators to exercise professional judgment within local situations—a significant feature of many positive school reform efforts (Wilson & Berne, 1999)—this freedom may be lost within the implementation process. For instance, districts may remove teachers from planning processes and mandate CCSS-aligned scripted materials that detail particular instructional methods. However, early CCSS implementation research found that when teachers developed their own materials rather than using materials developed by publishers, they had greater buy-in to the CCSS (Thomas B. Ford Institute, 2014). Moreover, educators who possess situational information about their students are positioned to use it in their curriculum and instruction to positively influence student learning (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Without the capacity to employ such situational knowledge and professional discretion in the development and implementation of materials, lessons, and assessments, teachers may engage with the CCSS for ELA ideally tailoring their instruction to the students they actually teach. Unfortunately, many policies exist that require teachers to mindlessly implement "standards-aligned" curricula that neither adequately cover the standards nor exhibit research-based understandings of ELA. Ideally, if more teachers and administrators have deep knowledge of literacy research, they can critique such curriculum and

lead school-based literacy learning inquiries. The ultimate focus, then, should be on increasing students' literacy learning and teachers' knowledge of literacy research rather than compliance in and of itself.

A Potential Orientation to the CCSS for ELA as a Static Document

Although the CCSS for ELA are intended to be a living work that is revised as new and better evidence emerges, it is possible that they will be approached as a static, all knowing document that requires compliance. This is problematic because particular standards have already been identified by numerous professional organizations, researchers, and educators as confusing, misaligned with research, or particularly challenging to implement. With no processes detailed for how or when the CCSS for ELA will be changed over time, concerns that they will not be approached as a "living document" seem valid. Indeed, the CCSS for ELA are new, and as detailed above, there are some portions that could be rewritten or elaborated on to better reflect research. As such, engaging in a cycle of continuous improvement of the CCSS for ELA is a critical piece of its implementation. In response to the potential opportunities and challenges associated with the CCSS for ELA, the next section turns to needed policy actions focused on research-based literacy teaching and learning.

Recommendations for Policy Action

To support literacy teaching and learning through the implementation of the CCSS for ELA, the overarching recommendation is as follows: Promote the use of research-based professional discretion by teachers and administrators to improve instruction in the implementation of the CCSS for ELA.

The findings of this review indicate needed policy actions related to the implementation of the CCSS for ELA in the following areas: (1) curriculum and instruction, (2) teacher education and professional development, (3) program/school leadership, (4) assessment, and (5) research.

Action 1: **Examine and develop curricular materials that demonstrate research-based literacy teaching and learning, and support teachers' instructional decision-making in curricular implementation.**

Within the context of an aggressive push for compliance to CCSS, there is a danger that educational leaders will focus on CCSS coverage when making resource and instructional decisions. This will be a lost opportunity for engaging and effective literacy teaching and learning. Instead, student learning should remain the guiding principle. The process of implementing the CCSS for ELA should be used as an occasion for curricular and instructional reform that enhances student learning. This reform should not involve "throwing out the baby with the bath water." Instead, it should build on existing materials and practices that support research-based literacy teaching and learning.

1.1 Examine curricular materials before making decisions about resource investments. A thorough review of existing and potential curricular materials is needed before investment decisions are made. School literacy curricula often make use of a range of materials such as basal

reader programs, workbooks, literature anthologies, novels, and other texts (informational, digital, etc.). In agreement with research-based literacy teaching and learning, the CCSS for ELA advocate for literacy instruction centered around high quality texts (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Consequently, resource investments should center on ensuring that teachers and students have access to a wide range of high quality textual materials. A particular concern, given that the CCSS for ELA aim to promote educational equity, is that some students will have access to a wide range of high quality texts, while other students will be limited to mandated scripted literacy programs (McCarthey, 2008). Furthermore, although there has been a proliferation of materials marketed as Common Core-aligned, caution should be exercised when purchasing these materials. According to literacy researcher David Pearson (2013) the publishers' guidelines for the CCSS in ELA (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012) are less comprehensive and more prescriptive than the CCSS for ELA; consequently, many published materials may neglect important aspects of the CCSS for ELA, in particular, the importance of local decision-making and the social-cultural nature of learning. In addition, researchers have yet to verify the degree of alignment of published reading/language arts instructional materials to the CCSS for ELA (a recent study of mathematics textbooks marketed as CCSS-aligned found only modest alignment to the standards [Polikoff, 2014]). And, as has historically been the case with respect to published basal reader programs for elementary school-aged children, there is no research evidence meeting What Works Clearinghouse standards indicating that any of them are effective in promoting student learning (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). Given the research base on the importance of access to quality texts and lack of research on CCSS-aligned materials, resource investments should primarily be made in high quality texts, with prepackaged programs as secondary supplements.

1.2 Develop curricular materials that promote the integrated nature of literacy. Research consistently indicates the integrated nature of literacy among reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Sperling, 1996) across subject areas (Pearson, Moje, & Greenleaf, 2010). Although the introductory section of the CCSS for ELA speaks specifically about the integrated nature of literacy, the organization of the CCSS for ELA into reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language may lead to the components of literacy being taught as isolated elements. The CCSS for ELA acknowledge that teachers and curriculum developers play a critical role in the design and effective implementation of curricular materials; it is critically important, therefore they be given time and support to plan collaboratively and to create exemplary units of study that highlight the integrated nature of literacy.

1.3 Ensure that teachers are supported in using their professional judgment on instructional methods that best meet student needs. The CCSS for ELA are not a curriculum, and they do not dictate instructional methods to educators. Instead, the CCSS for ELA establish goals, and teachers and schools are meant to figure out how to accomplish them. It is critical that state and school leaders recognize that there is not only one way to implement CCSS for ELA and that teachers be fully supported and enabled to remain responsive to particular school and classroom situations.

Action 2: Provide professional learning that equips teachers to implement research-based literacy instruction.

Although the CCSS for ELA represent a major shift in K-12 education with "qualitatively different outcomes," preliminary research shows that not all educators are familiar with the content of the CCSS (Supovitz, Fink, & Newman, 2014). Accordingly, some professional learning needs to simply focus on familiarizing educators with the Standards' goals and content. More importantly, though, professional learning needs to promote research-based understandings of language and literacy learning, as these understandings are not evident in much of school literacy instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2006) and are not necessarily explicit within the CCSS for ELA. Such professional learning will allow educators to use their professional judgment to implement the standards in ways that support research-based understanding of literacy. As discussed above, there are at least five possible research standards implementation gaps in content that warrant particular attention to professional learning: grade level progressions, text complexity, close reading, writing, and new media. Professional learning should primarily focus on increasing research-based understandings of the complex, situated nature of language and literacy practices that undergird the CCSS for ELA, as well as supporting teachers as they attempt to implement instruction that is both standards-aligned and research-based.

2.1 Support teacher education and accreditation programs that provide knowledge of the CCSS for ELA *and* research-based understandings of literacy development for teachers across the disciplines. Teacher candidates leave teacher education programs with variable knowledge about the CCSS for ELA and research-based understandings of literacy development (Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2013) at least in part because program faculty espouse vastly different stances towards the CCSS for ELA. These stances range from ignoring them to aligning their courses with them. As states begin to encourage standards-alignment of teacher preparation programs, program administrators and faculty should: (a) ensure that teacher candidates understand what is and is not covered in the CCSS for ELA; (b) provide opportunities for teacher candidates to apply the CCSS for ELA in planning, instruction, and assessment cycles; (c) increase faculty collaboration across disciplines on literacy instruction (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008); and (d) allot adequate time for literacy courses that cover the broad range of literacy topics, including writing and digital media literacy, which are often neglected topics in teacher preparation (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009).

2.2 Support professional development that provides knowledge of the CCSS for ELA *and* research-based understandings of literacy development for teachers across the disciplines. As with teacher education, professional development can increase teacher collaboration across disciplines on literacy instruction, and allot adequate time for literacy courses that cover the broad range of literacy topics, including writing and digital media literacy. Furthermore, professional development might provide concrete examples of CCSS-aligned instruction and time for common planning. Because professional development is most effective in small, collaborative learning communities that function on a long-term basis rather than as one-shot sessions (Fisher & Frey, 2013), school administrators should structure time and space for ongoing inquiry in professional learning communities. States, districts, schools, and higher education institutions should also offer fiscal and human capital that will enable teachers to engage in such work.

Action 3: Build leadership capacity to implement research-based literacy programs.

Effective leadership, which involves setting directions, developing people, and understanding context, plays an essential role in implementing educational reform initiatives that result in improved student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leaders who promote a shared sense of purpose around a meaningful set of goals are most likely to motivate others to act (Locke, Latham, & Erez, 1988). Leaders at multiple levels (e.g. state, university, district, school, classroom, community), then, must look beyond enforcing compliance and instead should be prepared to innovate and collaborate to promote a vision of standards-based reform centered on improving literacy teaching and learning.

3.1 Strengthen formal and informal partnerships among state, universities, districts, schools, and communities to collaborate around standards and research-based literacy initiatives. Although many individuals, groups, and institutions share the common goal of working to improve students' literacy learning, this work often occurs in isolated pockets with limited communication within and among groups. Building and strengthening partnerships and collaborations among those who share this common goal, including states, universities, districts, schools and communities, is imperative. The National Writing Project, for example, has been coupling university-based professional development for teacher leaders with subsequent in-service development led by teacher leaders in schools for over thirty years (Borko, 2004). The Institute for the Study of Literature, Literacy, and Culture at Temple University offers "an alliance of university, public school, and community educators" (Parks & Goldblatt, 2000). Some partnerships have centered their literacy initiatives on standards-based work. Through the Standards- Based Change (SBC) Process Developmental Model of School Change, for example, university faculties guide "a school's administrators and faculty to come together as a school-wide professional learning community, with the purpose of developing a staircase of coherent literacy curriculum" (Raphael, Au, & Goldman, 2009). Capitalizing on existing literacy collaborations of this nature or creating new ones, with a goal of standards-based literacy learning in mind, is important in the development of literacy leaders.

3.2 Ensure that preparation programs and professional development for school leaders foster leader knowledge, skills, and dispositions aligned with current language and literacy research. Professional learning for school leaders should develop their knowledge of the reading and writing practices that undergird the goals of the CCSS for ELA. This foundational knowledge will help administrators navigate among multiple recommendations from the state, district, and professional organizations. For example, different "instructional shifts" for ELA instruction have been identified by states, districts, and the major literacy professional organizations (see Table 3). When leaders couple their knowledge of literacy research and instructional shifts with an understanding of the local context within which they operate, they are in a strong position to promote meaningful goals that will benefit student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004).

3.3 Implement policies that foster school leaders' skills in instructional leadership, organizational leadership, policy, and adult learning related to literacy education. State agency budgets should be developed with adequate resources to deliver technical assistance, research and disseminate best practices, and offer incentives that spur local innovation. There should be clear communication between the state, districts, and schools about the vision for the CCSS. For example, administrators should also support teachers' professional learning about

literacy by providing time for common planning and professional inquiry. As described in Action 4, leaders must develop capacity for formative assessment that improves instruction, and they must develop capacity for digital assessments. State leaders should ensure that sufficient infrastructure for monitoring and supporting formative assessments is in place. For example, investing in longitudinal data systems will support data-informed continuous improvement and accountability.

3.4 Partner with families and communities to implement research-based literacy programs. Given the extensive research indicating the significant impact that families and communities can have on student achievement (Marzano, 2003), educational leaders must involve families and communities in the implementation of research-based literacy programs that align with CCSS for ELA. Leaders can, for instance, work with larger community groups and share community resources; include parents and community members in decision-making processes; and facilitate effective two-way communication between home and school to ensure common understandings about what we want children to learn and how we know children are learning (DuFour, Richard, DuFour, Rebecca, & Eaker, 2008). These common understandings are particularly important when many districts are making significant changes to common practices, such as moving from letter grades to standards-based grading. In addition, school leaders and community partners should work together to ensure that educators are aware of cultural and linguistic differences within communities and that these differences are treated as assets rather than deficits in schools and the wider community (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Action 4: Delay high-stakes accountability measures, and develop capacity for formative assessments that improve instruction.

The drive to rapidly implement CCSS has been accompanied by a similarly rapid move to design and implement CCSS assessments, which is not necessarily in the best interest of educators and students. The CCSS assessment consortia (PARCC for Illinois) are charged with developing high quality assessments that measure the full range of Common Core State Standards. They are responsible for creating summative assessments for reporting purposes and formative assessments for informing teachers' instructional decisions. As assessments tend to drive instruction (Hillocks, 2002), these assessments will likely play a powerful role in shaping how the CCSS for ELA are implemented in schools. Despite the critical nature of these assessments, limited research on them has been conducted. Summative assessments in particular have been used for accountability purposes, for example, funding and teacher promotion. Field testing for the PARCC summative assessments took place in spring 2014, but the majority of schools have not had the opportunity for trial tests, which might allow school leaders to identify and resolve potential problems of implementation. Neither have the results of these field tests been reported publicly (as of fall 2014). Field testing for the formative assessments has not yet taken place, and these assessments are not expected to be available until the 2015-16 school year.

4.1 Delay high-stakes summative assessments and accountability measures. Because so little is currently known about the CCSS for ELA assessments, it is highly problematic to link these assessments to high-stakes accountability measures that may negatively impact students, teachers, and schools. Caution should be used in issuing sanctions based on assessment results, particularly in the case of school districts with predominantly non-dominant populations in terms

of categories such as race, culture, language, disability, and income. Research focused on No Child Left Behind policies indicated that these populations were most often negatively impacted by high stakes policies, in effect, hurting the students that these policies were designed to help (Solórzano, 2008). It is important that this pattern is not repeated with CCSS assessments. The recommendation of delaying high-stakes assessments and accountability measures also aligns with recommendations from several literacy professional organizations, including the Learning First Alliance (AFT, NEA, NAES, NASP) and the IRA. While some states applied for and have been granted flexibility in implementing certain high stakes provisions, many other states, including Illinois, have put in place high-stakes measures in the first year of implementation despite a lack of knowledge about the tests and their potential impact.

4.2 Implement formative assessments that improve instruction. The assessment consortia have prioritized the development of summative assessments (assessments that measure student learning for reporting purposes) over formative assessments (assessments that inform teacher instruction for the purpose of student learning). This prioritization is problematic, as formative assessments have been shown to have a powerful effect on student learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). In contrast, there is evidence that summative assessments do not support effective teaching and student learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). It is hoped that the formative assessments provided by the assessment consortia will provide valuable information to guide instruction, but this information will not be enough. It is important that educators make assessment an integral part of instruction. Just as educators need time to develop curricular materials that align with research-based literacy practices, educators also need time to develop assessments that align with these instructional materials, as well as time to interpret assessments to inform instruction.

4.3 Develop capacity for administering digital assessments. Schools face a number of challenges as they prepare to administer the new digital assessments: ensuring that enough fully operational devices are available so that all students have one-to-one access for the time allotted for tests; ensuring that sufficient bandwidth is available for the online tests; and ensuring that staff and students are confident using digital equipment for testing (Center on Education Policy, 2013). An additional concern is that a school's digital equipment will be tied up for test training and test taking purposes and that, as a consequence, schools will neglect other valuable instructional uses of technology, such as for collaboration and digital composition. Given these challenges, educational leaders must work to develop capacity for administering digital assessments, as well as ensuring that digital equipment is used in a broad range of ways to support literacy learning.

Action 5: Collaborate in and support the development of needed research on literacy and the Common Core State Standards.

Policy and practice alike can and should be informed by research. Research is useful for instrumental purposes, conceptual insight, and political strategies. Collaborating on research and evaluation projects also offers policymakers and practitioners insights into the logic of research, which may ultimately inform their own work in new and useful ways (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007).

While perceptions of the CCSS and associated assessments have been widely debated, limited research on the CCSS for ELA, in particular, has been conducted. Because we have such limited understanding of how CCSS impact student learning, this research is essential. We recommend: (a) the development of a coherent research agenda, beginning with the identification of shared goals, as well as policy supports for this research agenda through (b) key strategies, and (c) the provision of human capital and funding resources.

5.1 Engage with researchers in Illinois, nationally, and internationally to develop a coherent literacy research agenda, with specific attention to implementation of the CCSS for ELA. Current Illinois policies for literacy and the CCSS primarily focus on accountability and assessment, rather than shared research goals. We recommend the development of an Illinois Literacy Research Agenda (ILRA) that identifies and prioritizes topics and issues related to effective literacy teaching and learning, including implementing the CCSS for ELA. A coordinated research agenda will allow students, families, educators, researchers, and policymakers to express their primary concerns and interests; guide researchers to focus their efforts in key areas; and support strategic policy making. Although the goals of this agenda should be determined collectively with the input of multiple stakeholders, from the research perspective represented in this brief we recommend the need for *research investigating how the CCSS for ELA influence literacy teaching and learning in Illinois and nationally*. For example, valuable research might include examining "Common Core-aligned" literacy curricula and materials, including both those commercially produced and those developed within schools; investigating the grade level progressions of the CCSS for ELA, so that these progressions may be refined and improved in accordance with evidence of student learning; exploring how the integrated nature of literacy (among reading, writing, speaking, and listening; across disciplines; and within social practice) is advanced or neglected as the CCSS for ELA document is brought to life in classrooms; and analyzing the nature of CCSS-aligned summative and formative assessments for ELA and their impact on teaching and learning across multiple contexts.

5.2 Develop a system for providing adequate resources for the Illinois Literacy Research Agenda. Who should be responsible for organizing and carrying out the Illinois Literacy Research Agenda, and who should be involved? Our recommendation is to bring together a task force to create and implement the Illinois Literacy Research Agenda. In Illinois, the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC)—"the legislated research arm of the Illinois P-20 council"—could guide the development of the ILRA. At the table, we suggest representation from key educational, professional, and legislative organizations including ISBE, the Illinois Reading Council (IRC), literacy researchers and teacher educators from state colleges and universities, district leaders and English Language Arts specialists, state-level education policy makers, and representatives from foundations. We also suggest that this task force look carefully at recommendations and research from leading literacy professional organizations, such as the International Reading Association, the Literacy Research Association, and National Council for Teachers of English. Strategies the task force should particularly consider to move toward the goals specified under 5.1 include: (a) developing consensus around a shared vision, and (b) identifying human capital and fiscal supports needed to implement this coordinated research. Finally, funding to build policy- and practice-relevant research capacity is clearly needed. Within the ILRA task force, state-level education policymakers and representatives of foundations, in particular, should lead the exploration of ways to fund the research agenda.

Conclusion

Because standards and accountability contexts change over time, implementing policies that support research-based literacy teaching and learning is more important than seeking mere compliance to the current particulars of the CCSS for ELA. This notion is aligned with the understanding that the CCSS for ELA is a "living document" that regularly evolves with new research and knowledge. To stay true to this vision, though, the processes for continually iterating the CCSS for ELA based on current research need to be clearly outlined and publicized.

In this document, we have recognized the potential opportunities of the CCSS for ELA, while also attending to likely implementation challenges, identifying both policy and localized efforts that we believe will support implementation of the CCSS for ELA in Illinois. In particular, we want to reiterate the importance of promoting educators' use of research-based professional judgment and employing formative assessments that support literacy teaching and learning rather than focusing primarily on summative, high-stakes assessments. Moving forward, it is our hope that collaborative pre-K-20 efforts through the Illinois Literacy Research Agenda will coordinate and support research that positively impacts literacy teaching and learning, with attention to the CCSS for ELA as one important component.

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